



The Cloak

The VISN 3 Palliative Care E-Newsletter

U.S. Department of
Veterans Affairs

Volume 7, Issue 3

July 2010

VISN 3 Palliative Care Program Update: Celebrating our Circle of Life Award News

Submitted by Therese Cortez, NP, ACHPN & Carol Luhrs, MD, FAAHPM

Our VISN 3 Palliative Care Program was notified by the American Hospital Association (AHA) in April, 2010 that we are one of the three recipients for the prestigious AHA Circle of Life Award. Each year, the American Hospital Association grants 3 organizations this top honor. The Circle of Life Award was presented at the American Hospital Association Leadership Summit in San Diego, CA on July 23, 2010.

The AHA Circle of Life Award recognizes innovative programs in the delivery of palliative and end of life care. The goal of the award is to increase understanding and awareness of the importance and value of providing high quality end of life care.

This is a significant honor for VISN 3, as we are the **first** VISN or VA Medical Center to receive the Circle of Life Award. As you may recall, VISN 3 received the Circle of Life *Citation of Honor Award* in 2006 for our innovations.

Initiated in November 2002, our VISN 3 Palliative Care Program has developed and sustained a network-wide, standardized, interdis-

ciplinary approach with Palliative Care Consultation Teams at all our facilities. Our VISN 3 Palliative Care Program is leading the VA system through the network-based organizational structure focusing on the standardization of care processes, communication across settings and sites, education and training, ensuring quality, and promoting access to hospice and palliative care.

As a result of the support from Network Executive Leadership, dedication and hard work of all our team members in our VISN and our enduring partners: GRECC, ICU, EES and HVP and the National VA HPC Program Office, we have been able to develop, expand and sustain an innovative program. Here's a "look back" at the innovations we have creatively developed and sustained since the inception of our program in FY 2003:

- Novel network-based organizational infrastructure with VISN interdisciplinary taskgroups, which has evolved to meet the needs of the PC Teams and new VISN and National CELC initiatives.
- VISN PC Strategic Plan based on NQF (National Quality Forum) Preferred Practices with CAPC (Center to Advance Palliative Care) recommendations for metrics.
- Standardized electronic templates for PC consultation and psychosocial, spiritual and mental health assessments which promotes comprehensive, interdisciplinary assessment and facilitates electronic data collection for measurement of operational and clinical data.
- Network-wide Palliative Care-ICU initiative, which incorporates the Comfort and Communication Quality Indicators, to provide PC to all patients in ICU, concomitant with other therapies provides PC earlier in the disease trajectory and increases access to Palliative Care for ICU patients.
- VISN communication among the members of the PC program by dissemination of work-group meeting schedule (continued on Page 2)



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SAVE THE DATE!!!

VISN Palliative Care Quarterly Meetings

Location: JJP- Bronx
VAMC Conference Room
3D-22

8:30AM-2:00PM
September 28, 2010
January 25, 2011

NJ HVP Educational Symposium

Location: Lyons VAMC
Auditorium
9:00AM-4:00PM
September 29, 2010





A Note From The Editor Judith L. Howe, PhD

What a wonderful accomplishment and testament to the hard work and dedication of the VISN 3 Palliative Care community to be recognized with the Circle of Life Award! Having witnessed the growth of the program from its inception in 2002, I am indeed struck by the foresight and energy of our group.

Here at the GRECC, we are honored to be an enduring partner of the Palliative Care initiative. Congratulations to all of our team members for their outstanding work. We look forward to many more successes.



Program Update

(continued from Page 1)



- HVP activities, upcoming educational events, policies, procedures, standards and tools developed by VISN PC workgroups.
- Development and enhancement of electronic data capture from standardized templates with automatic data transfer into the web-based VISN Report Card, eliminating manual data entry, thus increasing efficiency and minimizing errors. The Report Card data is used to provide feedback to PCCTs and leadership for QI and Strategic Planning.
- HVP Organizational Structure (regional and State): addresses local issues and provide community-based educational and outreach activities.
- VISN-wide Standards for the uniform delivery of PC: PC Teams, PC in the CLC and VISN Bereavement Program.
- VISN Bereaved Family Interviews: VISN 3 was the first network to develop a centralized process to interview families of Veterans who died in our VA facilities (FYs 2005- 2008). We are now participating with the National VA BFS, administered by the PROMISE Center, and our efforts to promote VISN-wide quality improvement initiative contributes to the National CELC QI Initiatives.
- Close collaboration with researchers at the JJP-Bronx/New York Harbor GRECC and HSR&D has been mutually beneficial. Researchers have assisted in strengthening outcome measurement and data collection for QI projects, such as the BFS and PC-ICU initiative. In turn, the uniform, comprehensive approach to PC in the VISN has supported the development of IRB-approved research projects on cost, symptoms and family satisfaction with care.
- Enduring partnership with VISN 3 GRECC Education and EES (Employee Education System) to promote VISN Palliative Care Quarterly Face-to-Face Meetings and VISN Education Programs to ensure the expertise of our PC team members, front line staff and HVP Partners in hospice and end of life care. The GRECC also publishes *The Cloak*.

It has been a tremendous honor and privilege working with all of you over the years. We look forward to continuing this exciting journey with you, as we innovatively pave the way to promote high quality end of life care for our Veterans and their families.

To our VISN 3 team members: please take a moment to congratulate yourself. This award signifies the unique talent, dedication and compassion of each and everyone of our VISN 3 team members. Congratulations to our VISN PC Program for this tremendous honor!!!



VISN Communication Skills Lab for Critical Care Nurses Update

Submitted by Therese Cortez, NP, ACHPN

A major FY 2010 initiative for our VISN ICU- Palliative Care Initiative is the implementation of the VISN Communication Skills Lab for Critical Care Nurses. Co-facilitated by Judith Nelson, MD, JD, Intensivist at Mount Sinai Medical Center, NYC and Kathleen Puntillo RN, PhD of University of California at San Francisco, this physician- nurse model has effectively provided an innovative approach to promoting nurse communication in the ICU.

The Communication Skills Lab provided an opportunity to validate the integral role nurses play in the promotion of comfort and communication in the ICU. Through active dialogue and interactive role play, the nurses were able to discuss challenges and barriers to effective communication, learn how to successfully negotiate with physicians and other members of the health care team, and effectively convene and participate in the interdisciplinary family meeting. A total of 100 ICU Nurses in our VISN have completed the Communication Skills Lab. Congratulations to our ICUs for the recent completion of the 2nd Round of the VISN ICU Communication Skills Lab:

March 19, 2010: East Orange ICU

May 24, 2010: New York ICU

May 25, 2010: Brooklyn ICU

May 26, 2010: JJP- Bronx ICU

May 27, 2010: Northport ICU

We could not move forward with this innovative educational skills lab without the support and coordination of our ICU Nurse Managers: Thelma Madarang, RN (New Jersey), Kathy Malone, RN (Brooklyn), Helen Rostata-Pesola, RN (NY), Barbara Brady-Guzzo, RN (NY), Tanya Garcia, RN (NY), Aneita Morgan, RN (Bronx), Iler Sanchez, RN (Bronx) and Vanessa Sewgobind- Chand, RN. A very special, "thank you," to our ELNEC ICU Nurse Champions in all ICUs who also collaborated with our team and the ICU Nurse Manager in planning the implementation of this skills lab.

With such positive feedback we have received from the two rounds that have taken place this FY, we are planning a 3rd Round in September, 2010. We are excited to plan this next round with our ICU Nurse Managers and Champions, as we strive towards the promotion of comfort and communication in our VISN 3 ICUs.

Save the Date....
VISN 3 Ceremony
American Hospital Association
Circle of Life Award

Tuesday, October 12, 2010

JJP- Bronx VAMC

3D-22 Conference Room

10:00am

The Many Benefits of Networking

Submitted by Louisa Daratsos, PhD, LCSW, ACSW

Louisa Daratsos, together with five other VA social workers from across the country participated in the first ever Association of Oncology Social Work Symposium on veterans' oncology and end of life issues at its annual conference on May 13, 2010. This well attended symposium highlighted several important points about our work. It educated community social workers about the services the VA offers veterans, especially veterans in need of palliative care, through didactic teaching and case examples. It demonstrated how the VA can work with community organizations and it provided education about "veteran centric" care by sharing important research about the demographics of the veteran population. As VA social workers, we came away from the experience of preparing and presenting with our own co-workers with a renewed sense of awe over our collective dedication to veterans and their end of life issues as well as the clinical expertise and creativity which we apply to our work.



So how did we come together to organize this symposium? A few of us knew one another slightly from conferences and from various email groups. Several emails went out both on VA Outlook based on knowing which members of AOSW worked for the VA and we formed a group of willing presenters who wanted to submit abstracts to the conference. Neil O'Connor, of the Madison, WI Vet Center and I worked with the AOSW Conference Planning Committee to best showcase the accepted abstracts. Then the group held a series of VANTS calls to organize the flow of presentations.

Whatever our profession, the VA offers us tremendous opportunities to promote awareness and education about palliative care for veterans and to grow our own knowledge in the process. We need to remember that the community treats the vast majority of veterans. Many of them and their clinicians do not know about the resources for which they might be eligible; but more importantly, the community veterans might be in need of these resources. Take the effort, as the VA AOSW members did, to advocate for veterans' issues to be part of your professional organization's conference objective, and find other opportunities to discuss veterans' issues. Your non VA colleagues will appreciate the education and you will be improving the lives of so many veterans and their families.

Photo (left to right): Karyn Berlin, Iowa City VA; Susie Lyons & Debbie Pais, Gainesville VA; Louisa Daratsos, Brooklyn VA; Linda Avery, Houston VA; Liz Wilde, St. Louis VA

Honoring our Veterans in the JJP Community Living Center

Submitted by Robyn Anderson, RN, MSN

A Memorial Tree was recently dedicated at the JJP Community Living Center (CLC) to honor those veterans who have died. An interdisciplinary committee was established to develop rituals to honor those veterans within the CLC who have died. After considering various options, the committee decided to dedicate a tree to those we have lost. A dedication ceremony was held on May 26, 2010 in the CLC courtyard. The ceremony was attended by veterans, staff, and family members. Chaplain Fredi Eckhardt led the dedication with reflections on those who have died and the impact they have had on those who



remain. The tree, which is located in an enclosed courtyard, is surrounded by flowering plants and flags. Attendees were provided with memorial stones, which they placed at the base of the tree to honor a veteran who has died. Flowering plants and flags surround the tree and a container of stones is available nearby for those who wish to place a stone. The ceremony was moving, allowing all present to reminisce about veterans who have touched our lives. Family members shared that the ceremony was comforting, reassuring them that their loved ones will not be forgotten.



Accomplishments and Awards

Congratulations to our VISN 3 Palliative Care Program for receiving the prestigious American Hospital Association Circle of Life Award. VISN 3 was selected as one of the three winners for the Circle of Life Award. The official VISN ceremony will take place on Tuesday, October 12, 2010 at the James J. Peters VA Medical Center.

Congratulations to Carol Luhrs, MD who was recognized by the National HPC Program for leading the National Comprehensive End of Life Care (CELC) Implementation Center. She was awarded this recognition by the VA Deputy Secretary, W. Scott Gould.

Congratulations to Aneita Morgan, RN, CHPN for passing the National Board for Certification of Hospice and Palliative Care RN Exam. Ms. Morgan is the ICU Nurse Manager at the JJP-Bronx VAMC and a member of the VISN ICU-Palliative Care Taskgroup.

Congratulations to Joby David, ANP-BC who was presented with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs Hands and Heart Award on April 16, 2010. This award recognizes VA employees who excel in providing excellent and compassionate patient care services. Ms. David is the Palliative Care Coordinator at VA Hudson Valley.

Congratulations to Kathleen Weston, NA, CHPNA for passing the National Board for Certification of Hospice and Palliative Care (NBCHPN) Nursing Assistant Exam. Ms. Weston is a Nursing Assistant in NH-1A at Northport VAMC and the first Nursing Assistant at Northport to achieve certification in Hospice and Palliative Care.

Congratulations to our PC Social Workers: Winsome Dyer, MSW (St. Albans), Jill Roth, LCSW (New York) and Mary Mantilla, MSW (Hudson Valley). Ms. Dyer and Ms. Roth completed the requirements for the NYU Silver School of Social Work Post-Master's Palliative & End of Life Certificate Program. Ms. Mantilla completed the requirements for the Smith College School of Social Work Post-Master's Palliative & End of Life Certificate Program.

Congratulations to Louisa Daratsos, PhD, LCSW, ACSW for successfully defending her doctoral dissertation.



****Book of Note****

Check out the recently published book by Springer, *Geriatric Mental Health Disaster and Emergency Preparedness* (John A. Toner, Therese M. Mierswa, and Judith L. Howe, Editors). Joanne Izzo, MDiv, LCSW-R, of the Brooklyn Campus, NYHC, authored a chapter on the experience of vulnerability in geriatric combat veterans with PTSD during disasters. Annette M. Atanous, MSSW, of the Bronx VA, is also a contributing author.



CELC Implementation Center Update July 2010

Submitted by Carol Luhrs, MD, Alba Lopez, MSW, and Haylin Genao



There is a great deal of activity at the Implementation Center as we approach the one year milestone of Palliative Care Leadership Center (PCLC) Mentorship for a many of our VISNs. For the past year, over 150 facilities have gone through intense training by VA and PCLC faculty experts in the field, who have shared their knowledge in order to help make our palliative care programs the best in the nation. We would like to thank all the Program Managers, Clinical Champions, VA-PCLC Faculty and of course our teams for all of their dedication and effort in making this program successful!



Dr. Carol Luhrs presenting at the National HPC Conference

Are You Plugged In?

Our Special Interest Groups

which were formed at the VA National Hospice & Palliative Care Conference on May 4-6, 2010 have started their calls:

- * Inpatient HPC Units
- * Hospice Veteran Partnerships
- * PC in Intensive Care
- * Developing PC programs in small VA facilities
- * Developing PC programs to meet the needs of patients with chronic mental illness

For more information please email: Haylin.Genao@va.gov

There is a National Hospice and Palliative Care CELC Implementation Center Sharepoint. The purpose of the Sharepoint is to assist our hospice and palliative care teams in developing programs by sharing information and materials previously created by VA staff. Please visit our sharepoint at: <https://vaww.vsn3.portal.va.gov/sites/NationalImplementationCenter/default.aspx>. For access to the sharepoint please email Haylin.genao@va.gov.

The Implementation Center will assist you in enhancing and sustaining your palliative care programs as the Comprehensive End of Life Care (CELC) Initiative moves forward. For any questions related to the Implementation Center, please contact: alba.lopez@va.gov or Haylin.genao@va.gov



Best Wishes To Our Graduating Palliative Care Interdisciplinary Fellows Class of 2010

Parampal Bhullar, MD will be working as a Palliative Care internist at Texas Tech Medical Center in Lubbock, TX.

Julia Drzycimski, PsyD will be the new Healthy Behaviors Coordinator at the Brooklyn VA Medical Center in Brooklyn, NY.

Mary Denyse, LMSW will be the first Social Worker with the Palliative Care team at Bellevue Hospital in New York, NY.

Robert Paulino, MD will begin work as an Attending Physician at Scranton-Temple Hospital in Scranton, PA where he will help establish palliative care programs. Photo (left to right): Robert, Parampal, Julia, and Mary



“LOOK AT ME”

Submitted by Brownie McClain, NA, VA NJ Health Care System, Lyons Campus

You may see me as desirable or undesirable
 I may lie in a grave and they may all look the same
 I may not even know my name
 I may isolate myself from others, cannot hear, yet hear voices or you may think
 I am insane,
 I may have two arms, one arm, or maybe none
 I may have a wheelchair, two legs to walk, none, or just one
 I may not know the time of day
 I may not even know where I stay
 I may not remember things at all
 I may just stare, stare, and stare at the wall
 I just see people passing me away
 Not taking the time to know me or help me in this day



“LOOK AT ME”

Do you see me?

I am the BRAVE

I am the STRONG

I am the COURAGEOUS

I am the HERO

I am the person who had the incredible strength to sign my name and give my life for my country,

So, when you see the American flag waving high

“Look at me”

Think of me

Do not just pass me by.

** This poem was written to honor the veterans and those who died to defend our country's freedom... 6/14/2010

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